

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of serving groups of contacts in a communications network; said method comprising:

maintaining contact data records related to a plurality of network contacts;  
5 generating presence information related to the availability of one or more of said plurality of network contacts;  
delivering said presence information to one or more network subscribers; and  
initiating data communication between at least one of said network subscribers  
and one or more of said plurality of network contacts in accordance with said  
10 presence information.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein said maintaining includes maintaining a database comprising network address information related to each of said plurality of network contacts.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein said maintaining includes creating a community of  
15 interest comprising members representing selected contact data records.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein said generating includes monitoring network activity of said one or more of said plurality of network contacts.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein said delivering is responsive to a request from said one or more network subscribers.

- 20 6. The method of claim 1 wherein said delivering includes apprising said one or more network subscribers of the network status of said one or more of said plurality of network contacts.

7. The method of claim 1 wherein said initiating includes identifying ones of said plurality of network contacts as available targets.

- 25 8. The method of claim 7 wherein said initiating includes establishing data communication with one or more of said available targets.

9. The method of claim 3 wherein said initiating includes establishing data communication with each of said members in said community of interest.

10. A system comprising:

30 a computer server executing basic network communication processing tasks;

a grouping server executing group related processing tasks and returning results to said computer server; and

a presence monitoring module monitoring network activity of a plurality of network contacts and providing presence information related to said network activity to said grouping server.

11. The system of claim 10 wherein said grouping server is responsive to requests from said computer server.

12. The system of claim 10 wherein said computer server is operative to receive data packets, to identify one or more intended recipients of said data packets, and to transmit identifying information associated with said one or more intended recipients to said grouping server, and wherein said grouping server, apprised of said identifying information and said presence information, is operative to identify available ones of said one or more intended recipients.

13. The system of claim 12 wherein said grouping server is operative to identify ones of said one or more intended recipients as members of a community of interest.

14. The system of claim 13 wherein said grouping server is operative to resolve a group request to one target selected from said members of said community of interest.

15. The system of claim 14 wherein said computer server is operative to initiate network communications involving said target.

16. The system of claim 13 wherein said grouping server is operative to identify more than one of said members of said community of interest as targets.

17. The system of claim 16 wherein said computer server is operative to initiate network communication involving ones of said targets.

18. The system of claim 13 wherein said computer server is operative to initiate network communication involving all of said members of said community of interest.

19. A server-based communication processing system comprising:

a communication processing server, having data and a communication processing engine residing thereon, identifying one or more intended recipients of a data transmission and executing basic data transmission processing tasks;

a grouping server, having data and a presence monitoring module residing thereon; said presence monitoring module generating presence data related to

network activity of said one or more intended recipients, and said grouping server receiving group related processing requests from said communication processing engine; and

a contact database having data records stored therein, said data records containing information associated with said one or more intended recipients and accessible to said grouping server.

20. The system of claim 19 wherein said grouping server is operative to resolve a group request to a single target selected from said one or more intended recipients in accordance with said presence data.

10 21. The system of claim 20 wherein said communication processing engine initiates a data transmission involving said target.

22. The system of claim 19 wherein said grouping server is operative to identify more than one available target selected from said one or more intended recipients in accordance with said data records and said presence data.

15 23. The system of claim 22 wherein said communication processing engine initiates a data transmission involving said more than one available target.

24. The system of claim 19 wherein said grouping server is operative to maintain at least one community of interest comprising selected data records stored in said contact database.

20 25. A computer-readable medium encoded with data and computer executable instructions for serving communities of interest; the data and instructions causing an apparatus executing the instructions to:

receive a data transmission directed to one or more intended recipients;

acquire presence information related to the network activity of said one or more intended recipients;

25 determine whether said data transmission requires group processing;

provide group related processing results in accordance with said presence information; and

initiate data communication in accordance with said group related processing results.

26. The computer-readable medium of claim 25 further encoded with data and instructions, further causing an apparatus to examine address information associated with said one or more intended recipients to identify a group.

27. The computer-readable medium of claim 25 further encoded with data and instructions, further causing an apparatus to resolve a group request to a single target recipient based upon said presence information.

28. The computer-readable medium of claim 25 further encoded with data and instructions, further causing an apparatus to identify a plurality of said one or more intended recipients as members of a community of interest.

29. The computer-readable medium of claim 28 further encoded with data and instructions, further causing an apparatus to establish data communication with each of said members of said community of interest.

30. A system serving communities of interest in a communications network; said system comprising:

a communication processing server, having data and a communication processing engine residing thereon, identifying one or more intended recipients of a data transmission and executing basic data transmission processing tasks;

group processing means for executing group related processing tasks responsive to instructions from said communication processing server;

a contact database having data records stored therein, said data records containing information associated with said one or more intended recipients and accessible to said group processing means; and

monitoring means for monitoring network activity of said one or more intended recipients, generating presence information related to said network activity, and communicating said presence information to said group processing means.

31. The system of claim 30 wherein said communication processing engine is operative to accept data packets having address information related to said one or more intended recipients.

32. The system of claim 30 wherein said group processing means is operative to resolve a group request to a single target recipient selected from said one or more intended recipients in accordance with said presence information.

33. The system of claim 30 wherein said group processing means is operative to identify ones of said one or more intended recipients as members of a community of interest.

34. The system of claim 33 wherein said communication processing engine is operative to initiate data communication involving each of said members.

5 35. The system of claim 30 wherein said communication processing server and said group processing means cooperate to maintain a community of interest comprising selected data records stored in said contact database.

36. The system of claim 35 further comprising means for selectively altering said selected data records in said community of interest.

10 37. The system of claim 35 further comprising means for transmitting said selected data records in said community of interest to network subscribers.

38. The system of claim 35 further comprising means for transmitting said presence data to network subscribers.

15 39. The system of claim 33 further comprising means for transmitting said presence data related to said members to network subscribers.